

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

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restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.
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Wanted: A Good Hotel in 1868-69

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In April 1865, a San Diego correspondent writing to the *San Francisco Daily Evening Bulletin* complained, "We have three hotels, with not more than business enough for one—and five stores whose prices are high, with few buyers." Merchant E. W. Morse, writing to his fiancé in September 1866, echoed these sentiments, "Business is very dull in town. I think I never saw it duller than it has been for the last week."

Much of that changed when the enterprising Alonzo Horton visited San Diego. This ambitious businessman had already started a town in Wisconsin, made money in the gold fields of California by trading ice to the miners, and ran a successful furniture store in San Francisco. Selling his San Francisco business, he moved to San Diego in 1867 for his next venture. Acquiring a large tract of land near San Diego Bay at auction for pennies, Horton set about surveying and subdividing his property.

Horton's enthusiasm and his promotional trips to San Francisco and San Jose brought

speculators to San Diego. In April 1868, a business associate of E.W. Morse wrote, "I understand that you have no hotel now open at San Diego, and that some of the persons who went down to prospect the County, returned on the same steamer disgusted because they could get no stopping place. San Diego ought to have a good hotel, if she expects to attract strangers."

Unfortunately, the Franklin House of Old Town was vacant at that time and other accommodations were minimal. By June, the Franklin was leased by mail contractor Albert L. Seeley, who renovated and refurnished it. Six months later plans were announced by the new proprietors to greatly enlarge and improve the Franklin.

Meanwhile, houses were quickly going up in Horton's New San Diego. Restaurants, bakeries, livery stables, saloons, and small stores made their appearance. Even Old Town tried to keep pace. In October 1868 a new dry goods store, another saloon, and a harness maker's establishment opened near the plaza. The city trustees attempted to beautify the public square, although some people complained about the crumbling adobes and the public use of the plaza for races and bull fights.

Steamers kept bringing a large influx of people and goods to San Diego. The town overflowed. In 1869 the newspaper noted port arrivals at the rate of about 1000 monthly. Others arrived by stage or other conveyance. Hotel accommodations were still much needed. Beds were even put up outdoors. Horton offered to give an entire block of land to anyone who would erect a first-class hotel on the property.

About a year after Seeley leased the Franklin, he planned a new hotel for Old Town by adding to Juan Bandini's old adobe *casa*. By July 1869, Spring Valley resident and newspaper correspondent R.K. Porter wrote, "Mr. Seeley's new hotel begins to present a fine appearance, and will be a great improvement in the appearance of the Plaza." By October, Porter praised the hotels of Old Town as the preference for families. He felt that Horton would have to build his own grand hotel for New Town.

As the year 1869 came to a close, the Old Town Plaza was again fenced and the traditional bull fights were held. Some of the best viewing was done from the balconies of the Franklin and Cosmopolitan Hotels. At the same time, Alonzo Horton announced plans for his own commodious brick hotel in New Town.

